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# Congressional Record - Minuteman II Operation Base Launch

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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February 5, 1974

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE

"GIANT PATRIOT"—MINUTEMAN II  
OPERATIONAL BASE LAUNCH

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a letter to Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger and signed by Senators METCALF, CHURCH, HATFIELD, and MANSFIELD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

JANUARY 31, 1974.

HON. JAMES R. SCHLESINGER,  
Secretary,  
Department of Defense,  
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: As United States Senators representing the Pacific Northwest, we share a great concern about the Department of the Air Force's plan to proceed with the testing of Minuteman II intercontinental ballistic missiles from operational silos in the Malmstrom Air Force Base complex and several other sites. We believe benefits from such a test will not be commensurate with potential dangers to lives, properties, and international implications.

The Minuteman II reportedly has performed very well during a series of tests at the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. What more can be learned from the proposed launches in Montana? Publicity associated with these tests and the extensive safety precautions would not contribute to a realistic combat situation. We doubt that data provided by such tests would contribute anything that has not already been determined from the heavily instrumented test range in California. Based on information available, we find it difficult to justify an expenditure of \$26.9 million for this purpose.

In addition, our constituents have expressed grave concern with regard to lives and property. We recognize that, as envisioned, the danger would be relatively small and it would be limited to sparsely populated and National Forest areas. Should something go wrong, however, the risks would be far more serious in one or more of our states. A disaster of this nature would have severe repercussions for domestic attitudes toward the military. Also, there is no guarantee that the chartered course of the missiles is firm. Newspaper accounts indicate that in several tests our U.S. missiles have gone off course and crashed in Mexico and as far away as Brazil.

Presentations made in behalf of these tests have indicated that they may be an important part in our international negotiations. The need for a show of strength is questionable and, should the inland test fail, it would erode United States confidence in, and reduce Soviet respect for, the United States nuclear deterrent. At the present time, the Minuteman Missile System is considered to be very reliable and we question the need for additional test sites.

The budget for Fiscal Year 1975 containing funds for the Minuteman II testing proposal will be scrutinized in great detail and we ask that your office review this matter in light of the concerns expressed above and withdraw your budget request for the Minuteman II Operational Base Launch.

Sincerely,

MIKE MANSFIELD,  
LEE METCALF,  
FRANK CHURCH,  
MARK HATFIELD,  
U.S. Senators.